

USPS Offers Hudson River School Art Background

As previously announced, the USPS issued four Hudson River School art stamps on August 21 at the APS Stamp Show in Hartford, Conn. The stamps are the 12th in the USPS's American Treasures series.

During the 19th century, the artists of a young America searched for a new world view and found it in the landscapes around them. The loose-knit Hudson River School of painters flourished from the mid-1830s to the mid-1870s and gave America its first major school of art.

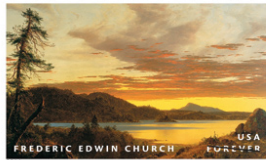
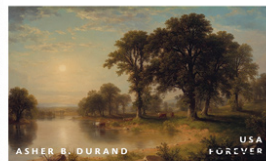
Clockwise from upper left, we see:

- Thomas Moran's 1912 painting *Grand Canyon*. The painting embodies Moran's ability to convey scenes that are idealized, but also recognizable to people who have seen the actual landscape themselves. "My aim," Moran said in 1878, "was to bring before the public the character of the region."

Through sketches and paintings, English-born artist Thomas Moran is associated with the American West, especially Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon. After studying art in Europe, Moran became intrigued by illustrations he was asked to rework for an 1871 Scribner's article about Yellowstone. Later that year, he joined Ferdinand V. Hayden's geological survey expedition to the West. At Yellowstone, he made field sketches and watercolor studies of hot springs, geysers, waterfalls and other natural features, later using them as the basis for large studio paintings. His works were the first color images of Yellowstone ever seen by residents of the eastern U.S. Along with the photographs of fellow expedition member William Henry Jackson they are credited with hastening the 1872 establishment of Yellowstone as America's first national park.

- Asher B. Durand's 1865 painting *Summer Afternoon*. Commissioned by Morris Jessup, a prominent railroad banker and first president of the American Museum of Natural History, the painting earned this praise from art critic Henry Tuckerman: "The sky, the atmosphere, the vegetation and especially the noble group of trees, all breathe an air of quiet brooding, warmth and repose."

Known for his appreciation for vivid natural detail and vistas bathed in golden light, Durand encouraged Americans to see the landscapes around them as rich sources of artistic and spiritual inspiration. Born in New Jersey, he studied engraving under his father. In his early 20s, as one



of the leading engravers and printmakers in New York City, he produced banknotes and illustrations—until the mid-1830s, when Thomas Cole inspired him to pursue painting. He exhibited several prominent landscapes inspired by an 1837 trip to the Adirondack Mountains with Cole. In 1841, he returned from a stint in Europe and focused on the Catskills and other areas of the Hudson River Valley.

- Thomas Cole's *Distant View of Niagara Falls*. The painting shows two Native Americans on a rocky ledge in front of a pristine and idealized view of the falls that, at the time Cole painted it in 1830,

were surrounded by factories, scenic overlooks and tourist hotels. "But great, glorious, and sublime Niagara—wonder to the eye of man—I do not wish to disparage thee," Cole wrote in 1846. "Thou hast a power to stir the deep soul."

Renowned for imbuing his landscapes with a strong sense of allegory and narrative, Cole is considered the unofficial founder of the Hudson River School. Born in England, he came to the U.S. with his family when he was 17. In 1825 he traveled up the Hudson River to the Catskill Mountains and turned his sketches into landscape paintings that caught the eye of Colonel John Trumbull, a famous painter of the American Revolution, who helped usher the artist into prominent New York cultural circles.

- Frederic Edwin Church's 1856 painting *Sunset*. Inspired by one of many summer trips to the area around Mount Katahdin, Maine, this idealized scene offers a fine example of Church's ability to create dramatic and convincing depictions of sunlight.

The Connecticut-born artist studied art with Cole in the Catskill Mountains in the mid-1840s, but soon developed his own unique style. Known for his incredible precision, Church dazzled viewers with paintings that were massive in size, meticulous in detail and conveyed a sense of the sublime. In his New York City studio, he combined sketches of various New York and New England locations into landscape paintings. In the 1870s, Church and his family took up permanent residence in the Hudson River Valley, where he built Olana, an estate with a magnificent view of the Catskills. Around his new home, now a New York State Historic Site, Church designed a garden landscape that won acclaim as a work of art.